

## Medical Humanities in Turkey: The Psych-Direction

### Abstract

Like many other literary traditions of the world, madness has been a theme of interest in Turkish literature. Some of the classic Turkish novels, for instance, utilise psychopathologies to ask broader questions. Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's *The Time Regulation Institute* (1962) employs it to criticise “western” ideas, particularly psychoanalysis. In *Motherland Hotel* (1973), Yusuf Atılgan portrays an obsessive character to depict the individual's alienation from himself and his society. However, in contemporary times, there is also a discernible inclination toward employing mental pathologies, informed by medical knowledge, to explore the troubled self. It seems that the developments in psychiatry and neuroscience have opened new epistemological realms for the creative imagination, while the dark recesses of the mind provide the writers with novel material for complex characterisations of troubled selves. Moreover, as an alternative pathway, a number of psychiatrists stand out with their literary works, revealing a reverse flow of the usual pattern.

This lecture will discuss a set of contemporary Turkish novels to examine the current prevalent relationship between mental health and the literary imagination. Representations of memory, mental illness, dreams, delusions, and hallucinations will be explored to present the varying manifestations of psychopathologies from the perspectives of both the novelists and the psychiatrists. Some of the questions it will elaborate upon are: Why is psychopathology an attractive subject for the contemporary Turkish novelists to explore selfhood? What can this inclination tell us about the current perceptions of mental illness and well-being? How do the depictions of the same subject differ in the works of psychiatrist-novelists? What do the similarities and differences between the works of novelists and those of psychiatrist-novelists signify for literature and medicine? I argue that the highlighted prevalent relationship might open up unique pathways to discuss the benefits of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary inquiries into medicine and humanities.

### Bio

**Burcu Alkan** is an Assistant Professor at the English Department of Yeditepe University, in Istanbul. Her monograph *Promethean Encounters: Representation of the Intellectual in the Modern Turkish Novel of the 1970s* was published in Germany in 2018. She is also the co-editor of *Turkish Literature as World Literature* (2021), *Dictionary of Literary Biography 373: Turkish Novelists Since 1960* (2013) and *Dictionary of Literary Biography 379: Turkish Novelists Since 1960, Second Series* (2016). In addition to her works that seek to reposition Turkish literature within world literary studies, her recent research focuses on psychiatry and medical humanities. She was the co-organiser of the “Transcultural Dialogues in Medical Humanities” workshop, first of its kind in Turkey, held at Özyeğin University, Istanbul, in 2016. Since then, she published numerous pieces on the relationship between literature and psychiatry and is currently working with the Faculty of Medicine at Yeditepe University to establish interdisciplinary bridges for research and education.